

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)568/02-03

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Panel on Transport

Minutes of special meeting held on Tuesday, 10 September 2002, at 10:45 am in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP (Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Members absent : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Non-Panel Members attending : Hon Cyd Ho Sau-lan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon NG Leung-sing, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP

- Public officers attending** : Environment, Transport and Works Bureau
- Dr Sarah LIAO Sau-tung
Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
- Mr Paul TANG
Deputy Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works (Transport and Works)
- Mrs Sharon YIP
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment,
Transport and Works (Transport and Works)
- Mr K M WOO
Chief Inspecting Officer (Railways)
- Transport Department
- Mrs Dorothy CHAN
Deputy Commissioner for Transport/
Transport Services & Management
- Ms Carolina YIP
Assistant Commissioner for Transport/Bus and Railway
- Attendance by invitation** : MTR Corporation Limited
- Mr Martin BROWN
Acting Operations Director
- Mr Eric HUI
Head of Operations
- Mrs Miranda LEUNG
Corporate Relations Manager
- Clerk in attendance** : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2
- Staff in attendance** : Miss Connie FUNG
Assistant Legal Adviser 3

Ms Alice AU
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

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I Problems of MTR train service operation

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)2495/01-02(01) - Letter dated 4 September 2002 from Hon CHENG Kar-foo;
LC Paper No. CB(1)2495/01-02(02) - Letter dated 6 September 2002 from Hon CHENG Kar-foo; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)2495/01-02(03) - Information paper provided by the MTR Corporation Limited)

The Chairman said that the recent spate of incidents involving MTR train services had aroused wide public concern. The meeting was convened to review with the parties concerned follow-up remedial or improvement measures identified or taken by MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.

2. The Chairman drew members' attention to the paper on "Review of MTR Train Service Incidents" (LC Paper No. CB(1) 2495/01-02(03)) provided by MTRCL, which was tabled at the meeting. Regarding the supplementary information requested by Mr CHENG Kar-foo vide his letter dated 6 September 2002, the Corporate Relations Manager of MTRCL (CRM/MTRCL) advised that the Corporation would provide a written response after the meeting.

3. Referring to the recent spate of MTR incidents, Mr CHENG Kar-foo pointed out that it was of paramount importance that appropriate rectification measures were being taken by the Corporation to avoid recurrence of similar incidents. He was dissatisfied that the Chairman of MTRCL had not turned up at the meeting to account for the causes of the incidents and briefed members on follow-up remedial or improvement measures identified or taken by MTRCL. On behalf of the Democratic Party, he registered his protest against the non-attendance of the Chairman of MTRCL.

4. Mr CHAN Kam-lam remarked that the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong was concerned about how similar incidents could be avoided in future. He called on the Corporation to critically review the manpower levels, and maintenance requirements of MTR so as to upkeep the performance standard of MTR. He said that it was unfortunate that the Chairman of MTRCL could not appear before the Panel to account for the incidents as to do so would help improve the public image of the Corporation.

5. Ms Emily LAU shared the view of Mr CHENG and Mr CHAN and remarked that the Chairman of MTRCL should make every effort to attend Panel meetings in future.

6. CRM/MTRCL said that due to prior engagement, the Chairman was unable to attend the meeting. She relayed his apology to members.

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Presentation by the Administration and MTRCL

7. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) said that the Administration was very concerned about the recent MTR train service incidents. It had requested MTRCL to investigate into the causes of the incidents and take necessary improvement measures to enhance the safety and performance levels of the MTR system. The Administration would conduct a review on the performance of the MTR system in the light of these incidents. The review would cover both the safety aspect and service performance of the MTR system.

8. Regarding the handling of service disruptions, SETW advised that the Transport Department (TD) operated the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre which provided a focal point for liaison with public transport operators on traffic and transport arrangements during serious traffic and transport disruptions. In light of the recent MTR train service incidents, the Administration had reviewed with MTRCL the alert system for MTR incidents and measures to improve information dissemination to passengers with a view to improving the contingency plans. MTRCL had deployed additional manpower to ensure platform safety in peak hours and increased safety message announcements on board. A publicity video had also been introduced.

9. On behalf of MTRCL, the Acting Operations Director of MTRCL (OD/MTRCL(Ag)) apologized to passengers and members for the inconvenience caused as a result of the recent service delays. He explained that as with the opening of any new railway lines, during the initial phase of operation, some teething problems were encountered resulting in service disruption. He thanked passengers for their patience and understanding. The Corporation was doing its very best to make sure that the disruption to passengers would be minimized and such incidents would be eliminated as soon as possible. The Corporation would like to reassure that the MTR system was designed and built to stringent safety standards with proven technology, and was well maintained to provide safe, comfortable and reliable train services. He then briefed members on the salient points of the paper tabled at the meeting.

10. Mr Fred LI expressed concern about the high number of train service incidents on the Kwun Tong Line, OD/MTRCL(Ag) explained that with the opening of Tseung Kwan O Line (TKL), the Kwun Tong Line was extended from Lam Tim to Tiu Keng Leng with the introduction of new signalling system and new trains. Due to the teething problems of the new systems, a number of incidents occurred on the Kwun Tong Line.

MTR maintenance and outsourcing

11. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah was concerned about the maintenance level of the MTR. He enquired whether the recent train service incidents were a result of the outsourcing arrangements, and how such maintenance works were carried out under the supervision, inspection and audit of MTRCL to ensure the quality and safety standard of the work.

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12. OD/MTRCL(Ag) replied that MTRCL had very comprehensive maintenance requirements in all aspects of the railway system. It had set up procedures for the maintenance of systems and trains. The outsourcing and tendering process of maintenance followed the high internal standards to ensure that there was no compromise to quality compared to MTR in-house work. Whether the maintenance was carried out by MTR staff or contractors, the requirements and standards were the same. Monitoring and supervision on the quality of work was carried out by MTR staff.

13. Regarding the adequacy of staff, OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that the manpower levels at MTR stations before and after the opening of the TKL were almost the same. All trains were operated by qualified and competent drivers.

14. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah queried why the manpower levels could remain unchanged with the opening of an additional railway line. He enquired whether Government had assessed whether the Corporation had sufficient manpower to cope with the new service.

15. The Chief Inspecting Officer (Railways) (CIO(R)) replied that the Corporation had developed and maintained contingency plans to be implemented in the event of an emergency on any part of the railway premises. Drills and exercises were conducted at regular intervals among relevant parties to enhance staff competence and co-ordination with external parties. OD/MTRCL(Ag) added that MTRCL was looking for every opportunity to improve productivity. Apart from applying new technology, the development of a multi-skilled work force had enabled the Corporation to re-deploy staff and reduce manpower. Outsourcing certain non-core maintenance and supporting services also served the purpose.

Incident at North Point on 5 September 2002

16. Noting that the incident at North Point on 5 September 2002 was caused by a broken conduit which was not a teething problem, and the fact that the modernized trains serving TKL were maintained by an external contractor, Mr Fred LI was concerned about the quality and effectiveness of the maintenance system.

17. Regarding the incident at North Point Station on 5 September 2002, OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that the root cause of the incident was not directly related to the operation of the new line. Preliminary examination revealed that a device switch used to monitor the coupling between train cars had short-circuited, generating a false alarm, causing the train to stall and unable to move under its own power. The switch and associated conduit were installed on the fleet between 1998 and 2001. This was the first occasion such a failure had occurred on the railway. There was no safety implications and at no time during the incident was passenger safety at risk. Whilst full technical investigation was underway, the Corporation would take necessary improvement measures to avoid future recurrence. The Corporation would review the design of the

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relevant items and whether there was a need to further enhance the maintenance procedures. It would also examine ways to improve information dissemination to passengers and to improve the contingency plans.

18. Ms Cyd HO remarked that instead of replacing a defective component when an incident occurred, preventive maintenance should be undertaken at the first instance. She said that there was a need to review the maintenance and replacement programme so as to ensure the safety and reliability of the system. Given that some of the components might be reaching the end of their serviceable life, the failure of a minor component would lead to a system halt which, in turn, would cause great inconvenience to passengers.

19. OD/MTRCL(Ag) replied that MTRCL put considerable resources in maintaining all its assets including equipment, systems, structure, tracks and trains to maintain the safety and reliability of service. Different components were replaced and renewed according to the condition, maintenance and replacement programme. It also carried out rigorous inspections to ensure quality and safety. For new trains, the manufacturer and the Corporation had worked hand in hand to review the design of the components and possible mechanism of failure so that it could be built into a discipline maintenance regime including examination, inspection and replacement.

20. Whilst concerning about the recent train service incidents, Mr Abraham SHEK remarked that the Corporation had established an excellent track record in railway operation. MTRCL also made a major contribution to Hong Kong's public transport system. As such, there was no question of management deficiency in MTRCL. Notwithstanding the above, he was concerned about the safety implications associated with the incidents. He enquired whether the Administration was prepared to engage an independent safety expert to review the ten incidents, which involved issues of maintenance, sub-contracting, signalling, and other safety and operational-related matters.

21. The Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Transport and Works) said that in light of the recent incidents, the Hong Kong Railway Inspectorate (HKRI) and TD were reviewing the safety and service performance of MTRCL. It would consider whether there was a need to advance the independent safety expert review on the safety management system of the Corporation.

22. Referring to the incident on 3 September 2002 in which a modernized train after departing Ngau Tau Kok Station with passengers on-board was routed to the depot track, OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that the train was properly protected by the signalling system at all times and safety to passengers was not impaired. On the need to engage independent safety expert, he said that MTRCL was required to maintain and operate the railway at all times having full regard to the safety of the system to the satisfaction of the HKRI. External review of its management system would also be conducted every three years.

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Testing and commissioning of the new MTR system

23. Ir Dr Raymond HO enquired whether the repeated occurrences of train service incidents were attributed to inadequate testing before commencement of the TKL.

24. OD/MTRCL(Ag) explained that the first new train was delivered to Siu Ho Wan Depot in October 2001 and was tested to ensure that it satisfied the specified safety and performance requirements. Before entering service, the train underwent a six-month testing and trial running at Kowloon Bay Depot and on Kwun Tong Line without passengers to prove compatibility with the existing railway systems, operational performance and reliability. The subsequent trains were similarly tested and commissioned against a sub-set of the tests applied to the first train.

25. Ir Dr Raymond HO enquired whether HKRI had conducted a separate assessment to ensure that the new trains were in all respects safe to be used for the conveyance of passengers in accordance with approved procedures.

26. CIO(R) advised that the HKRI had reviewed the safety features of the new trains during the design and manufacturing stage. Throughout the testing stage, HKRI had also deployed staff to monitor the testings and trials conducted by MTRCL. He said that MTRCL was required to maintain and operate the railway at all times having full regard to the safety of the system to the satisfaction of the HKRI.

27. Mr Andrew WONG remarked that in order to facilitate the monitoring of the performance of the Corporation, more information on testing and commissioning of MTR trains including the train modernization programme should be provided.

28. OD/MTRCL(Ag) replied that before any new lines entered passenger service, all systems on the new line including train control, signalling and power supply would be tested and commissioned individually. This would then be followed by a period of trial running to test their compatibility. He agreed to provide further information in this regard.

29. CIO(R) added that HKRI would continue to monitor the safety of trains after they were put into service. For instance, in light of the recent incidents involving passengers' arms caught in the train doors, HKRI had reviewed the design of the train doors and conducted sample checks to ensure that the trains were in full compliance with the required safety standards. Some enhancement had been made in the train door control circuit and the software on the new trains had been upgraded.

30. In response to Mr LEUNG Fu-wah's question, OD/MTRCL(Ag) explained the difference between the new trains and modernized trains. He said that the former had just been delivered from Korea. Regarding the latter, they were the original trains

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MTRCL which had been in use for years since opening of the railway system. During 1998 and 2000, these trains were modernized. Apart from refurbishing the whole train, a number of new passenger features were included. He agreed to provide further information in this regard.

31. Regarding the train modernization programme, OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that the saloon environment was much improved. The modernized train carriages provided better, more energy efficient lighting and ventilation. They also contained informative and user-friendly Flashing Route Maps showing the direction of travel, the next station and exit door. The driving cabs had also been upgraded to enable quicker fault diagnosis and easier recovery. The first modernized train had gone through extensive testings, both at depot and the line for three months. After satisfying all safety requirements and reliability tests, the remaining fleet was modernized in the same manner.

32. Mr Andrew WONG enquired about the tendering procedures for the procurement of new trains. OD/MTRCL(Ag) replied that a pre-qualification exercise was conducted at the outset to shortlist eligible candidates. Thereafter an open tendering exercise was conducted. A technical team was deployed to examine the technical submissions put forward by individual tenderers in terms of safety and reliability. Having satisfied the technical requirements, the contract was awarded to the conforming tenderer with the lowest bid.

Alerting procedure and information dissemination

33. On the incident at North Point Station on 5 September 2002, Mr CHAN Kam-lam, Mr Fred LI and the Chairman said that an Amber Alert should have been issued at 0848 hours when it first became evident that the incident train could not be driven from the rear, which would give an early warning to external parties. They therefore called on the Administration and MTRCL to review the information dissemination mechanism.

34. The Deputy Commissioner for Transport/Transport Services and Management concurred with members' view that passengers should be informed as earlier as possible when an emergency incident happened. At present, the source operator should issue the "Amber Alert" or "Red Alert" as follows:

- (a) "Amber Alert" should be issued by the source operator if he assessed that an emergency situation which could lead to a serious disruption of service was likely to arise;
- (b) "Red Alert" should be issued by the source operator if the emergency incident had occurred and was expected to continue for over 20 minutes and emergency transport support services from other operators were required.

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Upon receipt of an "Amber Alert" or "Red Alert" message, TD would keep in close touch with the source operator and prepare for possible remedial measures. Notwithstanding the above, the 20-minute rule did not mean that the source operator had to wait for 20 minutes or upon the completion of a thorough investigation before a "Red Alert" message was issued. In the light of the incident at North Point Station on 5 September 2002, TD had reviewed with MTRCL the contingency arrangement and ways to disseminate information to the general public with a view to minimizing the lead time for activating contingency arrangements when MTR incidents occurred. It was also agreed that more better use of the Amber Alert system to give an early warning to external parties should be encouraged.

35. Referring to the train service incident at North Point Station on 5 September 2002, OD/MTRCL(Ag) explained that for incidents involving short-circuit of a device switch inside the train, it would normally take three to four minutes to recover from the front cab and eight to ten minutes from the rear cab. However, in this particular incident, after conducting a series of trouble shooting and fault reset procedures, the train operator was unable to start the train. As soon as the Control Room staff realized that the incident would be a major one and would take more than 20 minutes to fix, the "Red Alert" message was issued. The Corporation was reviewing the alert system and see how information could be released to passengers at an early stage. CRM/MTRCL added that the Corporation would learn from experience and make every effort to improve the information dissemination system.

36. Referring to the statement made by the Chairman of MTRCL that there was no guarantee that there would not be delays on the railway, Ms Emily LAU considered this highly unsatisfactorily. For the interest of passengers, the Administration and MTRCL should aim at improving the situation as soon as possible. She enquired if MTRCL could guarantee that similar incidents would not occur again.

37. OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that improvement measures had been taken to avoid the recurrence of the same incident. Given the size of the railway system with more than thousand of train trips each day and each train had more than thousand components in it, it was not possible to guarantee that there would not be delay to the railway. However, the Corporation would guarantee that it would make every effort to upkeep the standard of the railway system.

38. Ms Emily LAU opined that there was a need to develop a more effective and speedy channel for disseminating information to passengers. The repeated occurrences of train service incidents would also ruin the reputation of the Corporation. She urged the Corporation to improve the situation.

39. CRM/MTRCL said that the Corporation set a very high performance standard. It hoped to bring back the train service to the highest level. The Corporation would

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introduce measures to speed up the flow of relevant information and provide adequate information to passengers and the general travelling public.

Imposition of penalty on MTRCL

40. Mr CHENG Kar-foo opined that the Administration should seriously consider imposing a penalty on MTRCL under the Mass Transit Railway Ordinance (Cap. 556) (MTRO) for its repeated failure in providing a proper and reliable service to the public.

41. SETW advised that under the MTRO, the Chief Executive in Council might impose on the Corporation a financial penalty for any failure by the Corporation to comply with any provision of the Ordinance or the operating agreement. In exercising the power, the Administration had to be satisfied that the failure was substantial or was persistent in nature and that MTRCL had failed to introduce improvement measures to remedy the failure within a reasonable time. The imposition of financial penalty had to be cautiously considered. For the recent MTR incidents, the Government had received reports from MTRCL and worked with them to identify measures to rectify the problems and ways to improve its contingency handling procedures.

42. Mr CHENG Kar-foo was not convinced of the Administration's reply. In light of the Corporation's view that the service incidents were merely teething problems during the initial phase of operation, he was worried that the Corporation might overlook the seriousness of the incidents. In order to prompt the Corporation to identify measures to rectify the problems in a more serious manner, he saw the need for the Administration to exercise the power granted under the MTRO to achieve the deterrent effect.

43. SETW replied that the Administration had no intention to protect MTRCL and had been requesting MTRCL to work out improvement measures to address the problems identified. The Administration would also continue to monitor closely the development.

44. CRM/MTRCL said that MTRCL was equally concerned about the recent train service incidents. Detailed investigation into the causes of each and every incident had been carried out. Improvement measures would be introduced to prevent similar occurrence in the future. The Corporation was also working on a number of initiatives to improve information dissemination to passengers and to improve the contingency plans. With the fine-tuning programme of the train control systems and the new trains, the performance of the MTR system would be brought back to the same high level as in the past.

45. Ms Cyd HO remarked that as Government was the majority shareholder of MTRCL, imposing a fine on MTRCL could not help achieve the desired effect. Instead of the persons responsible for the incidents, the general public would in the end bear the consequence of the penalty so imposed. Ms Cyd HO was concerned about the

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conflicting roles of the Government as the regulator and the majority shareholder of the Corporation and how it could ensure that suitable improvement measures would be put in place by MTRCL to address the problem.

46. SETW replied that whilst MTRCL was required to operate in accordance with prudent commercial principles, the Corporation was also committed to take up its social responsibility for the interest of the community. In addition, in order to ascertain whether there were systematic errors relating to the safety and operation of railway systems, the Administration would carry out detailed investigations to ascertain the causes of the incidents and work out improvement measures with MTRCL.

Motion

47. Members considered a motion moved by Mr CHENG Kar-foo at the meeting. Members agreed to proceed with the motion. Mr CHENG Kar-foo said that given the new TKL was still at its fine-tuning and testing stage and as a result, a series of service disruption incidents happened causing much inconvenience to the commuting public, the Administration should urge MTRCL to provide fare concessions to cross-harbour passengers travelling on the TKL and Kwun Tong Line during this fine-tuning and testing stage. The wording of Mr CHENG's motion was as follows:

“鑒於將軍澳支線仍然處於微調試驗階段，亦因而產生屢次故障，令乘客帶來不便，本事務委員會要求政府當局促請地鐵公司，於上述微調試驗之階段間，向使用將軍澳支線及觀塘線過海之乘客，提供票價優惠。”

48. OD/MTRCL(Ag) said that TKL was welcomed by residents in Tseung Kwan O. He noted members' concern about the delay caused by the service disruption. The Corporation was making every effort to improve the situation. CRM/MTRCL added that as with the opening of any new railway lines anywhere in the world, during the initial phase of operation, some teething problems were encountered resulting in service disruption. The Corporation was doing its very best to make sure that the disruption to passengers would be minimized and such incidents would be eliminated as soon as possible. MTRCL had re-launched the "Ride 10 Get One Free" to help relieve passengers' burden from September 2002 onwards.

49. Mr CHAN Kam-lam said that provision of fare concessions as a means to compensate passengers for any inconvenience caused by train service disruptions was not conducive to the solving of the problem. Rather, the Corporation and the Administration should be requested to introduce measures to ensure the performance and safety of MTR. Therefore he objected to the proposal of using fare concessions as a means of compensation. As a separate issue, Mr CHAN Kam-lam opined that the promotional concessions offered by MTRCL during the initial commencement of the TKL service should be made permanent as passengers on the Kwun Tong Line had to

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take a longer time to cross the harbour after the commissioning of the TKL. Mr Andrew WONG shared the view of Mr CHAN Kam-lam. He remarked that the design of TKL was not good enough and there was a need to improve the interchange arrangements at North Point Station and Quarry Bay Station for both eastbound and westbound passengers.

50. Whilst appreciating the views expressed by Mr CHENG and Mr CHAN, Mr Abraham SHEK remarked that it was not appropriate for Members of the Legislative Council to intervene into the operation of the Corporation, bearing in mind the implication on MTRCL which might affect its credit rating and costs of borrowing in the end. There was also a need to protect the interest of minority shareholders.

51. Ir Dr Raymond HO said that the proposed compensation arrangement could not help solve the problem. There was a need to find out the causes of the incidents and put in place improvement measures to address the problem. As such, he indicated his objection to the motion.

52. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah said that as the motion was moved without notice and taking into account the fact that the proposed concessions would only bring about benefits to a group of passengers at the expense of small investors of MTRCL, he did not support the motion.

53. Mr CHENG Kar-foo said that it was beyond doubt that MTRCL and the Administration should be requested to introduce suitable improvement measures to address the problems. This was in line with the comments made by members at the meeting. However as MTRCL was still fine-tuning the systems which should have been completed prior to the commissioning of the TKL, he considered it necessary for the Corporation to introduce some form of concessions to compensate for the inconvenience caused to passengers. It did not mean that MTRCL could evade its responsibility through this kind of offer.

54. Mr CHENG's motion was put to vote. The motion was not carried.

55. Members agreed to hold another meeting to continue discussion with the Administration and MTRCL. The Chairman of MTRCL should be invited to the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The said meeting was held on 17 October 2002.)

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II Any other business

56. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 January 2003